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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001119

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SUBJECT: REHABILITATING A CONTROVERSIAL CROWN PRINCE

REF: 01 KATHMANDU 2115

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski, Reasons 1.5(b),(d)

1. (C/NF) Summary. Visiting USAID consultant Dr. Scott Palmer briefed Nepal's Crown Prince Paras May 30 on similarities between Nepal's Maoists and Peru's Shining Path. The meeting marked Paras' first formal contact with U.S. officials as Crown Prince. (Note: Nepal's Royal Palace has asked that the meeting remain a secret. End Note.) Paras mostly kept his counsel, but showed a keen interest in learning how Nepal might respond to the Maoist crisis. Paras traveled recently to London - twice - and sat in when the head of British defense called on King Gyanendra, U.K. Charge confirmed. A controversial figure who has been accused of hit-and-run murder and pistol-whipping a policeman, Paras has begun to step into his new public role as Crown Prince, inaugurating a public event June 5. The King has given Paras his old job as Chairman of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation and entrusted a long-time confidant with overseeing Paras' personal and professional rehabilitation. Administrative changes at the Palace following the June 1, 2001 massacre make it difficult to establish contacts with aides to the royals. Paras remains widely despised, but in ways both public and private King Gyanendra has demonstrated that he intends to stand behind his son. End Summary.

#### USAID Consultant Briefs Crown Prince

2. (C/NF) Nepal's Crown Prince Paras met with Boston University Professor Scott Palmer, USAID Program Director, and Poloff May 30. It was Paras' first formal encounter with U.S. officials as Crown Prince. The meeting, which lasted just over an hour, took place at the offices of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), a quasi-governmental conservation organization founded by Paras' father, King Gyanendra. Paras serves as Chairman of the KMTNC, a post Gyanendra occupied until assuming the throne one year ago. Also present were Arup Rajouria, KMTNC Member Secretary, and a KMTNC staffer who served as notetaker. (Note: Paras' handlers indicated that they wanted the meeting to remain secret. Strictly protect. End Note.)

3. (C/NF) Professor Palmer, in Nepal as a consultant to USAID conflict resolution programs, briefed the Crown Prince on similarities between Maoist movements in Nepal and Peru, focussing on the Peruvian government response to the crisis and developmental efforts that contributed to the eventual dissolution of the Shining Path movement.

#### Prince of Few Words

4. (C/NF) Paras asked a few short, direct questions, but - whether out of insecurity or a desire not to show his hand - did not say very much. He was most interested to know what Nepal could do in response to the Maoist crisis, and asked for elaboration of the similarities between the Nepalese and Peruvian cases. He listened actively, nodding his head, expressing agreement and often filling in words during pauses in the Professor's presentation. His attention started to fade after about forty minutes; at that point Rajouria launched into a monologue about KMTNC programs and their similarity to the development efforts in Peru described by Palmer. Immediately following the meeting, Paras reportedly went to the Palace to meet and brief his father.

#### Close to British, Twice in London

5. (C/NF) To date, Paras, only other official contact with representatives of foreign governments occurred in Britain, where he traveled twice this year, once on an official visit hosted by Prince Charles and again to attend the funeral of the Queen Mother. British Charge told Poloff that the first visit had come at the initiative of Buckingham Palace. The two royal families have close ties, the Charge explained. When visiting British Chief of Defense Staff General Sir Michael Boyce called on King Gyanendra in late May, Charge related, Paras had sat in on the meeting. RNA contacts told the British that the event marked that first time the Crown Prince had joined his father at a formal call.

## Rehabilitating a Reckless Youth

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16. (SBU) Paras remains a controversial figure in Nepal (Reftel). In August, 2000, he allegedly ran over and killed a popular musician after an argument in a bar. Previous reports accuse him of running down one or two others and pistol-whipping a police officer. Because of this history, many accused Paras of having a hand in the massacre of much of Nepal's royal family on June 1, 2001. (Note: Paras, who was close to the late Crown Prince Dipendra, was present at the family gathering at which nine members of the royal family, including the King and Queen, were killed and several others injured. He was not himself injured. End Note.)

17. (SBU) The Palace is trying hard to rehabilitate both Paras, image and his character. After his father named him Crown Prince October 26, 2001, (Reftel) his first public appearance was at a December 6 program to mark his former high school's anniversary. After that he mostly kept out of sight, occasionally stepping out to worship at religious sites. He reportedly meets with tutors daily, though mostly to learn the ins-and-outs of court protocol and palace management.

18. (SBU) A milestone occurred on June 5 Paras when inaugurated an event to mark "World Environment Day" at the convention center in Kathmandu named for his uncle, the late King Birendra. Paras lit a ceremonial lamp and handed out awards, but did not speak. The occasion marked Paras' first solo public appearance as Crown Prince and was intensely covered by the media. (Note: The previous Crown Prince, Dipendra, often presided at such events. End Note.)

## Learning the Ropes, in Dad's Old Job

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19. (C/NF) As the Chairman of the KMTNC - a position formerly occupied by his father, the King, who founded the trust - Paras devotes considerable time learning about the organization's environmental and conservation work. Previously Paras was head of Kathmandu's Central Zoo, which falls under the administration of the KMTNC. The KMTNC Member Secretary, Arup Rajouria, an old confidant of King Gyanendra, has been charged with managing Paras' professional development. (Note: Rajouria was at the Kennedy School at Harvard in the early 90s when Paras was attending boarding school in New York. Gyanendra would order the future Crown Prince to travel to Cambridge on the weekends, so the Rajourias could watch over him. They let him sleep on a fold-out bed in the living room. End Note.) Besides arranging for Paras' orientation into his new responsibilities, Rajouria has also pushed for Paras to move out into the public eye. Rajouria was the impetus for Paras' participation in the June 5 environmental event. In conversations with Poloff, Rajouria insists that the events of the past year have matured Paras, and the Crown Prince has become more disciplined and serious of late.

## New System at Palace Isolates Royals

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110. (C) Much more was known about the previous Crown Prince, Dipendra. His Aide-de-Camp (ADC) met frequently with members of the diplomatic corps, and Dipendra himself socialized with foreign residents. Nepal's royals have kept a low profile following the June 1, 2001 royal family massacre, and now that Paras has become Crown Prince, he stays away from Kathmandu's nightspots. Moreover, after the June 1 incident the palace's ADC system was revamped. ADCs now rotate among members of the royal family, so that no single ADC develops too close a relationship with any single individual. (Note: Several ADCs were faulted - and disciplined - both for failing to prevent the June 1 massacre and for enabling late Crown Prince Dipendra's destructive behavior. End Note.)

## Comment

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111. (C/NF) While the institution of the monarchy is deeply revered in Nepal, Paras himself is widely despised. The Palace apparently hopes that by rehabilitating both the man and his image, the populace will eventually accept him as a royal in good standing. Paras has begun taking a few tentative steps out into the public eye, but is still kept muzzled and away from the press. The Palace likely took note of the publicity surrounding Professor Palmer's visit to Nepal - his meeting with the Prime Minister (which included top military brass) and a public speech to a foreign affairs organization were covered in the media. The Palace thus likely saw Palmer's stealth briefing for the Crown Prince as a contribution to the young dauphin's education, and also as a way to boost his self-esteem. Paras' road to rehabilitation will be long and mostly uphill.

